

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Chichester Bell and Charles Sumner Tainter, June 14, 1885, with transcript

Phonograph COPY Volta Laboratory, Washington, D. C., June 14th, 1885. To Dr. Chichester Bell and Mr. Tainter

I believe that the Phonograph is and has been for a long time past, in a condition for practical commercial use and that all our efforts should now be directed to placing the apparatus on the market. There are two lines of improvement open to us. In the first place we may attempt to improve the character of the reproduced speech so that it may be clearer and more distinct than it is at present; we may accept the articulation as clear enough for many practical purposes and simplify the apparatus so that it may be better adapted for immediate commercial use. The former plan will involve much labor and time — and after all we need never expect perfection. There is nothing perfect in this world. The steam engine itself after more than a hundred years of unceasing experiment is still in an imperfect state. Notwithstanding this it has been of use — and in spite of its many imperfections it has accomplished much towards the civilization of the world. The telephone again is still in an imperfect condition. I have no doubt that the articulation of the telephone can be greatly improved and yet it in spite of the imperfections of the instrument — hundreds of thousands of telephones are in daily use.

I am quite sure also that the Phonograph in its present form may be made of great use — and I would, therefore, urge upon you both the importance of devoting attention to the mechanical details of the apparatus rather than spend all your time in attempting to improve the character of the articulation.

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We should aim at portability and simplicity. I would urge the importance of making a Phonograph of minimum size. I have no doubt that a paper cylinder six inches long and half an inch in diameter — would have capacity enough for an ordinary business letter. The whole apparatus should be made of such a size that it can be 2 placed in a box and carried readily. This means reduction in size and weight and in number of parts as the great object of immediate effort.

I hope you understand all that I have said. Spoken to Mr. Tainter's Paper Cylinder Phonograph this 14th day of June 1885.

In proof thereof witness my voice!

Alex. G. Bell.